Chapter 5 Management Opportunities

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, The John Day Basin Resource Management Plan will revise and consolidate management decisions from portions of three existing Resource Management Plans. The No Action Alternative in the Draft Environment Impact Statement will be based on decisions contained in the existing plans.

Many of the decisions in the existing plans are still timely and management actions are working well. Those decisions will be brought forward as Actions Common to All Alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

The intent of this planning process is to focus on those decisions that will provide management direction for the acquired lands on the North Fork John Day River area, and decisions that will update or provide new management direction for resources, areas or actions that either were not addressed in previous plans, or where conditions (including the availability of new information or science) have extensively changed.

These new decisions or ***management opportunities*** are listed below. They were developed after considering issues and concerns elevated by the public during scoping for the AMS, and they will serve as a starting point as we develop alternatives in the next stage of the John Day Basin planning process. We have not listed all resources and resource uses below, only those where we will be considering a range of new decisions.

For the resource/resource use groupings below, we also briefly discuss the future ***desired conditions*** or outcomes which are the goal of our management actions.

Newly Acquired Lands

The lands on the North Fork of the John Day River that were newly acquired by the BLM in 2000 will require a full set of new decisions that will cover relevant natural, biological and cultural resources; and decisions about resource uses and any potential special designations.

Public Lands Managed by BLM Prior to Land Exchange

Water Quality and Quantity, and Riparian Areas

The primary features relating to the management of water quality and quantity, which the BLM has jurisdiction over with the planning area, are riparian areas including stream channels and floodplains. While only 7% of the total basin precipitation is intercepted BLM-managed lands in this planning area, a majority of the miles of larger river channels flow across BLM lands. As such, BLM shares the responsibility for many of the potential actions that can affect water quality and quantity with other adjacent land managers and owners.

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) and a resultant Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) guide revision of BLM RMPs in the Interior Columbia Basin. Both local conditions and the ICBEMP aquatic/riparian framework need to be integrated with new management direction.

Desired Conditions

The planning area is a healthy and productive landscape where diverse stakeholders from within and outside the John Day Basin work together to maintain and improve fish and wildlife habitat in a manner that supports the stewardship efforts of local land managers, makes efficient use of resources and respects property rights. Sustainable, resource-based activities contribute to the social, cultural and economic well-being of the Basin.

Riparian habitat has a diversity of shrub/tree species and age classes to provide habitat structure for those wildlife species using this habitat type. The herbaceous component of riparian/wetland areas is also stable and diverse to support species that use this component for nesting and/or foraging activities.

Vegetation, such as juniper, which alters the basin water yield is present in densities and locations within range of historic variability. Overland flow is in balance with the landscape. Erosion associated with overland flow does not shorten flow durations in intermittent streams.

Ribbons of stream flows are observed throughout the year and maintain a diverse texture of vegetation. Stream flows are dependable and sufficient for crop production during the peak of the growing season. John Day Basin wild fish run are healthy and sustainable.

Management Opportunities

The RMP will identify criteria or thresholds for determining watersheds that may need special emphasis because of human health concerns, aquatic or upland ecosystem health, or public uses.

This plan will incorporate ICBEMP information to develop an aquatic conservation strategy sufficient to protect anadromous and other native fish in the planning area. New science on disturbance regimes and riparian area management may be incorporated into the standards and guidelines for riparian areas. The mechanisms to achieve desired conditions for fish, water quality, water quantity, stream channels and floodplains may also be addressed through Best Management Practices.

Source water protection areas for public drinking water will be incorporated into the RMP along with management opportunities and Standards and Guidelines.

The existing RMPs did not address water quality limited streams (listed as 303d by the State of Oregon). The RMP will guide implementation of the Clean Water Act to protect and restore water quality and support state development and implementation of water quality measures (such as Total Maximum Daily Loads of sediment). BLM management opportunities to improve water quality on the 303d listed streams are greater in streams with considerable BLM ownership and cooperative neighbors.

With declining budgets, costs associated with management of water rights may be addressed with cooperative approaches to maintenance and utilization of water rights.

Leasing water rights to the water resources department on a temporary basis is an opportunity to contribute to instream flows and maintain these rights.

Stakeholders from within and outside of the planning area can provide grants to restore stream channels and floodplains in a fashion that meets their objectives and provides for the compatible beneficial uses of these resources. Examples include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council.

Higher order BLM managed stream channels and BLM managed floodplains give BLM the opportunity to store water in the floodplains for late season beneficial uses such as fishing, boating, irrigation, agriculture, etc. Restoring these floodplains presents opportunities to recharge alluvial aquifers and sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands.

Terrestrial Vegetation and Wildlife Habitat

Many of the desired vegetation and wildlife habitat goals and direction in the existing Resource Management Plans still apply, including guidance to promote forest health and sustainable resources, and provide habitat for native plant, fish, and wildlife habitats. However, specific objectives will be reviewed and updated to include new direction and science from ICBEMP and to identify priority plant species and habitats.

Desired Conditions

BLM land in the John Day Basin provides wildlife habitat where adequate forage, water, cover, structure, and security necessary for wildlife species are available and related to appropriate soil, climate and landform conditions.

Upland sagebrush-grassland habitat includes a mosaic of multiple aged shrubs, native and desirable non-native perennial grasses, and forbs to support species that utilize these habitat types. Western juniper dominance is limited to those areas where fire frequency is limited. Forested habitats are healthy, disease and insect resistant, and have a variety of structural stages.

Wildland and prescribed fires are an integral part of maintaining diverse and healthy upland and forested landscapes.

Non-native and/or feral sheep, goat and pig populations do not pose a threat to native wildlife species and their habitats.

Noxious and invasive weeds are not infesting new land, and infestations do not advance to large scale infestations. Large scale infestations have been isolated and controlled in all habitat types to reduce the threat to wildlife habitat and populations. Previously infested lands are re-vegetated with functional and structural groups of vegetation that closely match the potential ecological site description.

Management Opportunities

Specific objectives will be reviewed to include new direction and science from ICBEMP. In addition the RMP will, in close coordination with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, describe existing and desired winter range for big game, and will address changes in federal listings of wildlife species with habitat in the planning area. Criteria

may be developed for deciding where resource uses may need to be modified to protect, mitigate, or restore important plant communities, wildlife habitats, and sensitive species.

There are opportunities to improve sustainability and resiliency of terrestrial vegetation conditions, and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic losses from insect and disease outbreak or severe wildfire through management actions such as thinning stands to reduce densities, and use of prescribed fire to reduce amounts and concentrations of fuels. Determining locations and best methods for meeting these desired conditions can be achieved by comparing current vegetative conditions with those conditions predicted to occur within historic ranges. Sites with the greatest deviation from desired conditions may be prioritized for treatment. Implementation schedules will be updated to facilitate a more consistent means to meet demands and needs of the local communities within the planning area.

BLM was authorized under the 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Act (Section 323 of P.L. 108-7) to use stewardship contracting to reduce hazardous fuels and restore forest and rangeland health. Long-term contracts (up to 10 years) foster a public/private partnership by giving those who undertake stewardship contracts the security to invest in equipment and infrastructure that will enable them to productively use the biomass generated from these stewardship services to make products or to produce biomass energy. Local economies may benefit in this manner.

Fire is an important ecological component, as well as a primary public safety concern. The RMP will identify areas within the planning area desired conditions may be met through the use of wildfire as a management tool.

Special Designations, Wilderness Study Areas, and Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Resource Management Plan will identify the long-term desired condition, distribution and location of areas with special management emphasis. Within the John Day Basin planning area there are potential special management areas that contain unique or representative resource values. Other areas may have characteristics that make them eligible for consideration as a National Wild and Scenic River or Wilderness Study Areas. For areas which meet the relevance and importance criteria, the plan will identify goals, standards, and objectives for each area. Constraints and mitigation measures will be identified that are needed to protect the areas.

Desired Condition

The resources that led to the designation of special management areas are protected and guidelines for the amount and type of public uses are established. Wilderness Study Areas, and river segments that are considered suitable for Wild and Scenic designation, are managed to maintain suitability characteristics. Opportunities and partnerships for public education, enjoyment and interpretation for these resources are fostered.

Management Opportunities

The management guidance for the current Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) of Horn Butte Curlew and Spanish Gulch will be reviewed, and potential ACECs will be determined.

BLM managed lands within the planning area will be assessed for wilderness characteristics and those areas that meet the criteria may be proposed as Wilderness Study Areas. This review will include proposals for potential wilderness areas that are submitted by the public.

All river segments in the planning area will be assessed for suitability as National Wild & Scenic River designation. Those sections determined suitable will be recommended for inclusion into the National Wild & Scenic River System (though final designation would be an Act of Congress), and interim management will be developed. Existing designated Wild and Scenic Rivers will be managed in order to protect their outstandingly remarkably values and maintain and enhance the outstanding river related values.

Land Ownership, Rights-of-Way and Easements

Land ownership patterns have changed since the previous RMPs were developed, and there is a need to review and update land tenure classifications, lands suitable for disposal, and rights-of-way.

Desired Conditions

BLM lands are managed in the best ownership patterns to serve national interests and the needs of state and local people, including needs for lands for the economy, community services, recreation areas, food, fiber, minerals and fish and wildlife. Changes in public land ownership are considered where consistent with public land management policy and where these changes would result in improved management efficiency.

Management Opportunities

The John Day Basin RMP will determine the desired location and arrangement of BLM managed lands across the planning area, consistent with the goals, standards, and objectives for natural resources, efficiency in land management, consolidation of ownership, and community expansion.

During the planning process, mutually beneficial solutions to access concerns will be identified, as well as areas where individual right-of-ways (ROW) may be appropriate. Locations for ROW corridors to minimize adverse environmental impacts of multiple, separate right-of-way corridors, and corridors for potential renewable energy projects will be assessed.

There is also an opportunity to identify conditions where existing ROWs would be abandoned, e.g., when combined with other compatible uses, terminated, or no longer necessary due to change in land ownership as a result of Oregon Land Exchange Act of 2000. We will explore new public easement opportunities for access to lands acquired under the Oregon Land exchange Act of 2000.

Transportation and Access

The RMP will delineate travel management areas and designate off-highway vehicle management areas within BLM managed lands across the planning area. Decisions will

include whether the area is open, limited or closed to motorized vehicles and acceptable modes of access and travel for each travel management area.

Desired Conditions

The transportation system meets recreational, commercial, educational and administrative user needs while minimizing impacts to other resource values such as sensitive soils, wildlife, visual quality, cultural resources, and fisheries. Routes that remain in the managed transportation system are managed to provide for public safety and resource protection.

Management opportunities

The RMP will examine regional and local transportation systems in the planning area, focusing primarily on BLM-managed roads to assess access concerns for visitors and local communities. Conditions or criteria would be developed to help evaluate BLM-managed roads which currently are not classified as part of the system, to help determine whether they should remain in the system, or be decommissioned.

The RMP will examine the long-term desired conditions for areas within the planning area that would be “open”, “limited” or “closed” to OHV use. The RMP will identify criteria for resolving conflicts between motorized users and adjacent residents or other uses of BLM-managed lands. Opportunities for areas suitable for motorized routes that could provide winter riding opportunities will be assessed. Adjacent county and Forest Service management will be incorporated into future decisions on open, limited or closed designation of the John Day Basin planning area.

The RMP will provide guidance for coordination with local and state transportation managers to develop accurate transportation maps for the public.

Management guidelines for motorized route maintenance will be provided.

Recreation

The Resource Management Plan will assess and identify, if suitable, any special recreation management areas (SRMA) and the recreation management strategies associated with those areas.

Desired Condition

A variety of land and river-based, non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities are available on BLM-managed lands, resulting in enjoyable recreation experiences, minimizing conflicts with other public land users and promoting sustained, diverse, visitor use without degradation of resources.

Management Opportunities

The RMP will identify criteria for reducing conflicts between recreation users and other uses on BLM-managed lands. Priority actions and recreation site improvements will be identified. Potential for using permits or R&PP leases to address recreation-related opportunities will be addressed.

Livestock Grazing

The existing RMPs made decisions about forage allocation and areas available for livestock grazing based on resource conditions that, for the most part, are unchanged. The existing plans did not, however, provide guidance for the resolution of conflicts between public land livestock grazing, and uses and values on public land and adjacent private land.

Desired Condition

Livestock grazing occurs in a pattern across the planning area where economically feasible, socially compatible, and environmentally responsible, that support community demands and contribute to local economy and quality of life.

Management Opportunities

The RMP will develop a set of indicators to measure potential conflict in livestock grazing allotments. Conflicts are those between livestock grazing and resource values, and between livestock grazing and other uses on or adjacent to public land. When indicators reach a threshold, priorities will be established for actions to reduce conflicts. Actions may involve vegetation management to improve livestock forage or wildlife habitat, modifications or reductions in grazing use, or modification of other uses such as recreation and rights-of-way.